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AUTHOR Clark, Vernon L.: And Others
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ABSTRACT

Seven fundamental questions pertinent to the evaluation of inservice personnel training programs are listed: 1) To what extent is useful, need-oriented, and relevant training provided to personnel participating in the program? 2) Are the trainees mastering the various tasks, competencies, data etc. being provided in the various elements of the program? 3) To what extent are trainees able to implement and apply knowledge, skills, and practices mastered in the program to their own classrooms? 4) To what extent are those with whom the trainee works demonstrating or reflecting the impact of the trainee's project developed skills? 5) To what extent has administration of the program been successful? 6) What kind of unexpected effects has the training program had on the educational system of which it is a part? and 7) To what extent has the training program minimized the need for qualified personnel in the content area of the program and the geographical area of need where the program takes place. (JD)

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FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS PERTINENT TO THE EVALUATION OF IN-SERVICE PERSONNEL TRAINING PROGRAMS

by

Vernon L. Clark, Ph.D.
Ronald H. Brown, Ed.D.
Lois W. Green, Ed.D.

Rural In-Service Training Program

for

Regular Education Personnel

Elizabeth City, N. C.

Joseph Samuels, Ph.D.
San Diego State University
San Diego, California

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS PERTINENT TO THE EVALUATION OF IN-SERVICE PERSONNEL TRAINING PROGRAMS

(Abstract)

The evaluation of an in-service training program should be viewed as 1) a continuous process of providing specific training and technical assistance to a designated target population coupled with 2) an equally continuous process of gathering and analyzing pertinent data to identify appropriate programmatic actions. Inherent to this interpretation of evaluation should be an attempt to address seven very basic evaluation questions as the training program conducts its formative, process, and summative activities. The questions are as follows:

#1 To what extent is the training staff and its designated consultants providing useful, need-oriented, and relevant training to the personnel (trainees), participating in the training program?

#2 To what extent are the trainees mastering the various designated tasks, competencies, data, etc. being provided in the various elements of the training program?

#3 In the trainee(s) own unique working environments (classrooms, etc.) to what extent are the trainees able to implement and apply the knowledge, skills, and practices gained and mastered as a result of participation in this training program?

#4 In reference to those with whom the trainees work and/or serve directly(i.e., children, adolescents, teachers, administrators, etc.) to what extent are these groups of persons demonstrating or reflecting the impact of the trainee's project-developed skills and competencies?

#5 To what extent has the program accomplished its designated objectives for 1)the organization and administration of the training program, 2)the management of its training activities, 3)and the completion of its information-sharing, research, and program documentation tasks?

#6 What kind of unexpected effects has the training program had on the organizational structure(college, university, school system, department, etc.) of which the training program is a part?

#7 To what extent has the training program minimized the need for qualified personnel in the content area of training and the geographical area of need where the training takes place?

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INTRODUCTION

In personnel preparation program efforts, particularly in-service training programs, there are six very basic and fundamentally imperative questions that must be addressed. It is essential that these questions be addressed if there is to be a comprehensive and useful evaluation of the personnel preparation program. By no means should these six questions be viewed as the "alpha and omega" of the program evaluation. However, these questions and their inherent concerns do form a significant portion of the base from which any other evaluative questions, issues, concerns, etc. could emanate.

This paper has identified and discussed the six questions, individually, while also presenting examples of data that could be collected to assist in forming reasoned responses to each question. Following the discussion of these questions, a listing of practical evaluation activities has been presented. These evaluation activities can help ensure the identification and collection of the range of relevant data essential to responding to the program's evaluation questions.

This paper is directed toward those personnel who have responsibility for designing, organizing, implementing, and developing the evaluation plan for an in-

service training program(s), or other programs designed to develop or enhance a trainee's skills and competencies. Throughout the paper the following terms have been used; the terms are presented and operationally described below:

training program:	the entire program, or unit conducting training activities for an identified target group
trainer:	an individual who has the responsibility for conducting the training program. A trainer can be a consultant, teacher, professor, or administrator charged with improving and increasing competencies and skills of an identified group being trained
trainee:	those personnel who are duly associated with a training program for the purpose of improving, enhancing, and increasing their own skills and competencies; these trainees may be employed teachers, administrators, pre-service program persons (undergraduate and/or graduate students) or paraprofessionals and/or others involved in in-service skill development activities.

I

A PERSPECTIVE ON EVALUATION

Although each training or preparatory program must determine its own perspective on evaluation, the following definition is presented for consideration; this definition was proposed by Phi Delta Kappa National Study Committee on Evaluation and cited in Educational Evaluation and Decision-Making (1971).

> Educatinal evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives.

The spirit of this definition portrays evaluation as a continuous and unending process of gathering pertinent data that reflects a range of perspectives and that can be used to determine appropriate programmatic actions; these actions should be of a formative, process and summative nature. In determining its perspective on evaluation, the training program must initially determine what kinds of questions it wishes to address and the program planning and evaluation demands the training program anticipates. These demands can come from funding agencies, regulatory agencies, trainees, consumers, training program staff personnel, and other professionals in the field of pre- and in-service personnel training.

II

THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

QUESTION #1

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE TRAINING STAFF AND ITS DESIGNATED CONSULTANTS PROVIDING USEFUL, NEED-ORIENTED, AND RELEVANT TRAINING TO THE PERSONNEL (TRAINEES), PARTICIPATING IN THE TRAINING PROGRAM?

Discussion of Question #1

The emphasis of this question is on ascertaining how well the appropriate information is being conveyed from the trainers (individually and collectively) to those being trained--the trainees, both individually and collectively. The training program should be interested in how well trainers perform on an individual basis and also how well the trainers perform when viewed as a group. The data to be collected should be such that decisions can be reached about individual trainer competence and performance and aggregate trainer competences and performances.

Kinds of Data to be Collected to Address Question #1

- Weekly evaluations designed by the training program and completed by the trainees; these evaluations should deal with the basic question: "How useful is the information being provided?"

- Regular formal communications with the supervisors, advisors, or superiors of those in the training program; these communications should include discussion of the trainee(s)' noticeable skill enhancement and improved practices.
- Written reports from the training staff and/or consultants detailing their observations of the trainee(s) during technical assistance visits to the working sites of the trainee(s). These on-site visits allow trainers to see the trainees "plying their trades." This particular item would apply most to those employed trainees involved in in-service training.
- Reports, formal and informal, from externally conducted evaluation personnel.

QUESTION #2

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE TRAINEES MASTERING THE VARIOUS DESIGNATED TASKS, COMPETENCIES, DATA, ETC. BEING PROVIDED IN THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM?

Discussion of Question #2

The force of this question is directed toward the quality of learning and mastery being achieved by the trainees themselves. This question attempts to draw a differentiating line between quality of training by trainers and quality of learning and mastery by trainees. Preparatory training programs must not assume that content mastery will normally follow or result from the presence of quality training and instruction. Consequently, in the evaluation of a training program's impact there must be specific identifiable questions addressing both training-quality and content-mastery.

Kinds of Data to be Collected to Address Question #2

- Written reports from the training program staff and/or consultants that detail their observations of the trainee(s).
- Regular documented communications by the training staff based on contacts with the supervisors and colleagues of the trainees in the personnel training program; these communications shall describe the nature of these contacts in terms of how supervisors and coordinators perceive the performance of the trainees.
- Documentation of the quality of the children's progress who are being taught or treated by the trainees; this documentation can be developed and compiled by the trainees and/or the trainers and need not be composed solely of standardized test data but show a range of information on performances.
- Self-growth information provided by the trainees. This information should provide the trainee's own perception of his/her professional improvement.
- Regularly scheduled competency-based examinations demonstrating the trainee's mastery of designated competency.

QUESTION #3

IN THE TRAINEE(S) OWN UNIQUE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS (CLASSROOMS, ETC.) TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE TRAINEES ABLE TO IMPLEMENT AND APPLY THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND PRACTICES GAINED AND MASTERED AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS TRAINING PROGRAM?

Discussion of Question #3

Two criteria of success for any training or skill development program are (1) its ability to assist its graduates to implement/apply knowledge, and (2) its ability to discern the extent its graduates can and are productively applying the knowledge gained. Question #3 speaks to these criteria. A training program's responsibility to its trainees does not cease upon the trainee's graduation from the training program. Various post-graduation data collection contacts are essential ingredients to the training program's attempts to improve its specific and overall acumen in personnel preparation. These data-gathering contacts along with subsequent analyses and decision-making tasks are as relevant to program quality as any daily training activity.

Kinds of Data to be Collected to Address Question #3

- Recorded observations of trainees by training program staff and appropriately designated consultants.
- Reports from trainees' supervisors, coordinators, etc. that describe the effects of the trainees in their own unique working environments.
- Documentation of changes made within the working environments by trainees.

QUESTION #4

IN REFERENCE TO THOSE WITH WHOM THE TRAINEES WORK AND/OR SERVE DIRECTLY (I.E., CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATIORS, ETC.) TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THESE GROUPS OF PERSONS DEMONSTRATING OR REFLECTING THE IMPACT OF THE

TRAINEES' PROJECT-DEVELOPED SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES?

Discussion of Question #4

The gist of this question is pointed toward the impact of the trainee on other personnel in his working environment. When trainees are making valuable and need-based contributions, it is reasonable to expect that there will be some degree of impact on those with whom the trainees have direct and consistent contact and those for whom the trainees may have care responsibilities. The ascertainment of this impact, however, may not be quickly and easily identifiable and may require obtaining longitudinal impact data.

Kinds of Data To Be Collected to Address Question #4

- Reports on communications with school building administrators that describe trainee-initiated changes and influences.
- Data submitted by the trainees supporting what trainees consider to be areas in which they have had an impact or influence.
- Data on the frequency with which trainees have been requested to provide consultative assistance to other personnel and individuals not involved in the training program.

QUESTION #5

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHED ITS DESIGNATED OBJECTIVES FOR (1) THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM, (2) THE MANAGEMENT OF ITS TRAINING ACTIVITIES, (3) AND THE COMPLETION OF ITS INFORMATION-SHARING, RESEARCH, AND PROGRAM DOCUMENTATION TASKS?

Discussion of Question #5

This concern addresses the overall management of the training program; it also addresses the program's inherent responsibility to document its successes and actions, such that others can vicariously share and benefit directly from the accomplishments and learnings of the training program. There is an implicit obligation of any educational effort to conduct research tasks on the important and pivotal facets of its work and to subsequently disseminate and share these findings--be they positive or negative--with the profession in general and specific pockets of the profession. This responsibility may not be presented as a "non-negotiable dictum" of a funding agency or some regulatory group, nevertheless, this responsibility must be dispatched if for no other reason than the trainers felt need to add to the proverbial "storehouse of knowledge."

Kinds of Data to be Collected to Address Question #5

- A report of the total listing of objectives specified by the training program at its outset; this report must specify the extent to which each objective is being met or has been met.
- A corollary report of the activities implemented to accomplish each objective--this report should specify which activities were useful in achieving the particular objectives and which activities were not useful.
- A report of the training program's analyses of any internally or externally commissioned evaluation reports along with the comments sought from those with whom the trainers work.
- A report of the performances of the trainees on the examinations and other skill tests.

QUESTION #6

(A) WHAT KIND OF UNEXPECTED EFFECTS HAS THE TRAININC PROGRAM HAD ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE (COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL SYSTEM, DEPARTMENT, ETC.) OF WHICH THE TRAINING PROGRAM IS A PART?

Discussion of Question 6(A)

This question speaks to the informal, unplanned positive impact and benefits the training program has on its surrounding organizational unit(s). Examples of such impacts and benefits are (1) new course offerings or emphases that reflect the philosophy of the training program, (2) revised academic concentrations, (3) additional personnel, (4) new and/or revised curricula products and practices, (5) a broader than expected repertoire of non-project contributed resources upon which to draw, (6) unexpected publicity and dissemination made available to the training program, (7) unexpected adherents and affiliations that provide additional support and expression to the program, (8) impromptu requests from various quarters for information, technical assistance, training, and support (9) improved performances of those with whom trainees have direct and indirect daily contact, (10) increased lay public awareness of the existence and work of the program, and (11) unexpected replications in whole and/or in part of the training program.

(B) TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE TRAINING PROGRAM MINIMIZED THE NEED FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL IN THE CONTENT AREA OF TRAINING AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF NEED WHERE THE TRAINING TAKES PLACE?

Discussion of Question 6(B)

The activities of the training program should viably contribute to the desolution of (1) personnel needs in the particular content/subject areas, i.e., diagnosis and remediation of learning difficulties, and (2) the total numerical number of personnel needed in the geographical target area, i.e., Northeastern North Carolina. These indices are excellent ways to manifest the positive impact of the training program; the indices can also be used to justify the appropriateness of the program's organization, development, objectives, and activities, and to justify the continued funding and support of the training program as long as the need and population continue to exist and be fruitfully addressed.

Kinds of Data to be Collected to Address Questions #6(A) & (B)

- Statements and documentation from personnel associated with the training program's organizational unit that attest to the training program's impact; such personnel could be vice-presidents, department chairpersons, supervisors, superintendents, and assistant superintendents, or other appropriate administrative personnel of the organizational unit of which the training program is a part.
- Statements and documentation of personnel needs from applicable local educaton agencies (LEA) and/or state education agencies (SEA).

III

A SAMPLE OF PRACTICAL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

The training program should be prepared to implement certain evaluation activities to ensure that the needed data are not only identified but also timely secured and analyzed to make appropriate decisions. The following evaluation activites are indicative of what can be used by training programs:

- Development and regular monitoring of a training-by-objectives procedural plan that highlights training goals, objectives, activities, and evaluation procedures, including resources to be used.
- Communications with and reports from supervisors of trainees in the training program.
- Reports from designated consultants describing their observations of trainees involved in "plying their trade."
- Regularly scheduled staff meetings where training program progress is discussed.
- Periodic but regularly scheduled and received evaluative comments and recommendations from the trainees themselves.
- Competency check-outs (quizzes) conducted after each training seminar, session, module, etc.
- A cost-benefit procedure for determining the relative economic costs of the program for the gains achieved by the program.
- Development and organization of external evaluation procedures such as third party evaluations conducted by personnel not directly associated with the training program.
- Establishment of the following indices of accountability:

- measurable objectives

- designated expectations of each objective and their corollary enabling activities

- identification and behavioral description of each program personnel's job responsibilities and professional obligations

- a timeline or milestone chart displaying due dates for specific designated accomplishments

- specific evaluation procedures for every aspect of the training program

As a training program attempts to analyze its collected data, the program should be prepared to use the following criteria, or similar criteria, to help judge those data:

- all data must meet program-ascertained standards of validity, objectivity, and reliability.

- all data must be relevant to the issues, questions, or other training program matters being addressed

- all data used must be very important to the decision-making tasks; the training program should disregard the least important and least pivotal data

- all data must reflect a variety of pertinent perspectives; there should be an unbiased spectrum of information brought to bear on the pertinent evaluation questions

- all data sources must have credibility--the information must come from a source the training program considers valid and reliable

- all data essential to the various decisions must be secured and analyzed with attention to timeliness; the provision of good information at the time it is needed can make a great deal of difference in a training program's program-planning and evaluation activities; the best data can be rendered useless if it is received and/or used too late (or too early)

- all pertinent data should be appropriately and timely disseminated; provisions must be made to inform all those who need to know of the findings of the evaluation activities.

Pertinent to these criteria of accountability is the extreme importance of clarifying the varied utility of the training program. Schmidt and Associates (1975) produced a listing of questions that when addressed by the training program should enhance the worth of the training program's evaluative data to potential users, replicators, and consumers of the program's findings and recommendations. The Schmidt et al listing reflects a cognizance of the previous six questions discussed; however, the listing is presented here to offer to the readers a different approach to expressing important evaluation questions.

SCHMIDT'S ET AL

GUIDE FOR A USER

1. What are the objectives of the program?

2. What would you consider acceptable evidence of achievement of program objectives?

3. What mechanisms (policies, guidelines, staff activities) exist to achieve the above objectives?

4. Why will Event "A" lead to Event "B"? This leads to showing causal relationships and making assumptions regarding linking events.

5. What does Congress/OMB expect of the agency/program in terms of performance? Are they consistent from year to year?

6. What do you perceive as the most serious difficulty facing the program in terms of meeting its objectives?

7. What performance information is needed to do this job?

8. If you had the above information, what would you do with it?

9. Have you seen the program's present information systems? Is it adequate for your needs?

10. How do you get the information you need to do your job? How satisfied are you with this information?

11. What do you consider to be the most important thing that you must accomplish in the next year? What information do you think you need? How will you get it?

12. What are the most important issues or questions that you believe an evaluation of the program should answer?

EPILOGUE

A clear, consistent and useful evaluation plan is basic to any training program. An evaluation plan is a major portion of any training program description or proposal seeking external support. Your training program can be conceptually sound and pragmatically useful if it reflects the questions discussed in this paper.

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